BRITISH COLUMBIA

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The Honourable Iona Campagnolo

Lieutenant-Governor

— at the —

Opening of the Third Session,

Thirty-Eighth Parliament

— of the —

Province of British Columbia

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I WISH TO RECOGNIZE THOSE IN ATTENDANCE including former Lieutenant-Governor, the Honourable Garde Gardom.

Once again I have the great privilege of addressing you as we begin a new session of the Parliament of British Columbia.

It is important we remember and honour British Columbians who have passed away since this Assembly last convened.

All British Columbians join the Nisga'a people in sadness at the loss of their Chief of Chiefs, Dr. Frank Calder.

We mourn the passing of former members of this Assembly, Val Anderson, Ray Williston, and Peter Hyndman.

Our communities were strengthened and built by former mayors we lost this year: 17-term Prince Rupert Mayor Peter Lester, Marilyn Baker of the District of North Vancouver, Doug Drummond of Burnaby, Ken Hill of Esquimalt, and Jack Loucks of North Vancouver City.

We mourn the loss of Hereditary Chief Jerry Jack of the Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nation, Grand Chief Peter C. James of the Katzie First Nation, and Chief Roy Mussell of the Skwah Band of the Sto-lo Nation.

Our arts community lost friends with the passing of coastal painter E.J. Hughes, filmmaker Daryl Duke, actor and playwright Mavor Moore, poet Max Plater, entertainer Fran Dowie, and volunteers Ernie Fladell and Reva Lander.

The world of journalism lost the bylines of Elizabeth Aird and Denny Boyd.

We lost British Columbians who showed us that individuals can make a difference: Ken Willoughby, who raised awareness about prostate cancer; John Turvey, who helped the residents in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; and Yung Quon Yu, president of the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver.

We are saddened by the loss of former Supreme Court Justice John Caldwell Cowan, former deputy minister Stanley Paul Dubas, and Thomas Kunito Shoyama, one of Canada's most respected civil servants.

We remember our dedicated members of the public service who passed away in the last year: Wilma E. Blanchard, Roberta Campbell, Alice Chu, Allan Clayton, Brenda C. Code, Jeanne L. Cressey, Lyndon Cross, Jane Fernandez, Rita Foreman, Craig William Gibson, Karen Hoyseth, Mary C. Hudson, Debbie Hunt, Andrea LaCasse, Theresa Lewis, Douglas W. McKay, Theresa M. Marsolais, Richard Martin, Roger Motut, Parminder Nagra, Rosetta Neal, Nurani Rahemtulla, Joy E. Rushton, Susan H. Schneider, John W. Schildroth, John Schindel, Donna Sheardown, Barbara Sheldan, Lynne Webb, and Larry Wells.

We were also reminded of the sacrifices made by our Armed Forces serving in Afghanistan in mourning the loss of Corporal Andrew James Eykelenboom of Comox and Bombardier Myles Mansell of Victoria.

Tragedy touched us and took from us too soon Gerald Foisy and Shirley Rosette of 108 Mile House in the sinking of the *Queen of the North*, and Bob Newcombe, Doug Erickson, and paramedics Shawn Currier and Kim Weitzel in the Sullivan Mine tragedy. All are remembered with respect.

Over the last five years British Columbians have marshalled their effort and energy to turn the province into an economic powerhouse and a centre for social innovation and improvement.

Self confidence and optimism have created a legacy of leadership rooted in the power of individual aspiration and the potency of common purpose.

Today we live in a world redefined by enormous shifts in our demographic, economic, and environmental makeup.

At the heart of the government's agenda lies this simple question: What can we do today to secure the future for our children and grandchildren?

This is a time for partnership not partisanship, for boldness not trepidation, for action not procrastination.

British Columbians accomplish what we set our minds to do. We worked together to rebuild our financial foundation. Today, the economy is on track and, for the first time since 1983, we have regained a triple-A credit rating.

Over the last five years British Columbia has led the nation in job growth. The Conference Board of Canada ranks our health system as the best in Canada. Our students are outperforming their counterparts in international assessments.

We have worked together to preserve vast areas of wilderness, to create the Kitasoo Spirit Bear Conservancy, and to pioneer ecosystem-based management.

The Conservation Investment and Incentives Initiative creates a $120-million partnership to build economic development and conservation programs with First Nations in valuable coastal rainforests.

Last year's unprecedented labour agreements are widely recognized as a singular feat of leadership. Public sector workers worked with government to find solutions that were constructive, flexible, and innovative. There have been fewer strikes and lockouts due to labour disputes in B.C. over the past four years than at any time on record.

The precedent-setting Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement with Alberta will create jobs and opportunity in every region of the province.

Rural British Columbia has record levels of employment and economic growth. That is a credit to our citizens and their hard work.

When we act with resolve and with common purpose, we succeed. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the New Relationship we are forging with First Nations.

First Nations' leaders are leading Canada to close the gaps in health, education, housing, and economic opportunity. Their legacy is a testament to positive leadership and a lasting contribution to Canada.

The powerful currents sweeping across our lives today call for long-term vision not short-term expedience, for selfless rather than selfish actions, for focused rather than fractured responses, and for decision not delay. They demand we look to ourselves for change before asking it of others.

Today's youth are wondering what the future holds for them.

Will we have the courage to tackle difficult problems that have no easy solutions?

Can we find the resolve to ask more of ourselves than we demand of others?

Will we have the foresight to reach higher in education and literacy, to reduce the weight of our footprint on the environment, or to sustain our public health care system?

To these questions your government answers — yes.

We are obliged to act — individually and collectively — before the tipping point becomes the breaking point.

Your government will act:

- To lead Canada in partnership with First Nations.
- To tackle the challenges of global warming and unplanned urban sprawl.
- To increase affordable housing, reduce homelessness, and help those who cannot help themselves.
- To improve quality, choice, and accountability in our two most important public services — education and health care.
- To open up Canada's Pacific Gateway and strengthen our economic competitiveness.

These are the elements of the Pacific Leadership Agenda. They are all crucial to achieving the Five Great Goals for the Golden Decade that lies ahead.

Your Government has begun the Long Journey to Reconciliation with First Nations

The First Nations Leadership Council deserves our thanks for their open and positive leadership.

Today, three Final Agreements under the B.C. Treaty Commission are being considered for ratification by First Nations.

Those treaties are harbingers of hope and reconciliation of Aboriginal rights with the responsibilities of the Crown.

If they are ratified within the next few months, legislation will be brought to this House for full consideration.

The Province appreciates the federal government's partnership in reaching this historic stage in the treaty processes for the Maa-nulth, Lheidli T'enneh, and Tsawwassen people.

Last year's historic agreements with the Songhees, Esquimalt, Tsay Keh Dene, and Kwadacha people also attest to a New Relationship between First Nations and government.

The Transformative Change Accord, the new health, education and housing frameworks, and hundreds of working agreements between the Province and First Nations will enable First Nations to better control their own destinies.

Recognition of First Nations' contributions to our history and our culture are critical components of reconciliation.

New Osoyoos, Haida Gwaii, and Squamish-Lil'wat cultural centres will reconcile the past with a positive future.

New curricula will be developed with First Nations historians. Oral histories will be gathered through conversations with First Nations Elders.

More will be done to enhance and preserve First Nations languages.

With that spirit of respect and reconciliation in mind, your government will work with this Assembly and First Nations to act on the recommendation of the 2001 review dealing with the artwork in the lower rotunda of the Parliament Buildings.

British Columbia is leading the way towards a positive, contemporary vision for Canada that recognizes all of its founding partners.

It stands proudly for the inclusion of Canada's Aboriginal people as full founding partners in Confederation.

It stands firmly for the recognition and respect of Aboriginal rights, title, and self-determination within the Canadian Constitution.

As we have worked to establish a New Relationship with First Nations, so too must we redefine our relationship with our natural surroundings.

British Columbia has Established a Reputation for Environmental Leadership

Over the last five years the government has built on that legacy.

Wildlife habitat protection has expanded from 10,000 hectares to over four million hectares.

For the first time ever, a program is in place to clean up old contaminated sites on Crown land.

Today, 14 per cent of British Columbia land is protected — more than any other province.

This government has created 43 new Class A parks and expanded 38 existing parks.

Your government will act this year to establish several new Class A parks and conservancies and to expand many other existing ones.

Changes will be introduced to strengthen forest stewardship and reduce the risk of forest fires.

Other amendments will improve forest health, encourage better utilization of beetle-killed timber and salvage fiber, and strengthen actions against those who damage our forest or range resources.

After decades of inaction, both groundwater protection and a drinking water action plan are in place.

A $21-million Living Rivers Trust has been established to enhance watershed management and restore fish habitat.

The new $150-million Canada-British Columbia Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund will support green projects that improve water quality, wastewater, sewage treatment, and public transit.

After years of denial, the evidence is clear.

Victoria's raw sewage is contaminating the ocean floor and polluting the Pacific.

That is not acceptable. And it will be remedied.

Your government will fund up to one-third of the costs of a new sewage treatment facility for Greater Victoria.

As important as all of these priorities are, none is more important than the critical problem of global warming and climate change.

The challenge of reversing global warming is more difficult today than it was in 1992 at the Rio Summit and more dire than it was in 1997 in Kyoto.

The Kyoto Treaty, which is now in place, just came into force two years ago this Friday.

Little has been done to seriously address this problem which is literally threatening life on Earth as we know it.

Since 1997, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to grow here in British Columbia and across Canada.

Voluntary regimes have not worked.

In 2007, British Columbia will take concerted provincial action to halt and reverse the growth in greenhouse gases.

We will forge new partnerships across both provincial and national boundaries.

The government will act now and will act deliberately.

British Columbia's greenhouse gas emissions are now estimated to be 35 per cent higher than in 1990. The rate of atmospheric warming over the last 50 years is faster than at any time in the past 1,000 years.

The science is clear. It leaves no room for procrastination. Global warming is real.

We will act to stem its growth and minimize the impacts already unleashed. The more timid our response is, the harsher the consequences will be.

If we fail to act aggressively and shoulder our responsibility, we know what our children can expect — shrinking glaciers and snow packs, drying lakes and streams, and changes in the ocean's chemistry.

Our wildlife, plant life, and ocean life will all be hurt in ways we cannot know and dare not imagine.

We do know this — what each of us does matters. What everyone does matters.

Things we take for granted and that have taken millennia to evolve could be at risk and lost in the lifetimes of our children.

Action on climate change was promised in your government's election platform. It is central to the Great Goal of leading the world in sustainable environmental management and it has been an important performance objective in the Province's last two strategic plans. The energy plan government adopted in 2002 is the cleanest, greenest energy plan in North America.

More air shed management plans have been developed over the past five years than in the entire previous decade. A 40-point action plan on climate change was adopted in 2004 and an energy efficient buildings plan in 2005.

Between 2000 and 2004, government's own emissions were reduced by 24 per cent. British Columbia now has the second lowest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

However, our emissions are increasing at a rate far faster than most of our neighbours'.

We must act to arrest and reverse that trend.

This government will firmly establish British Columbia standards for action on climate change.

It will aim to reduce B.C.'s greenhouse gas emissions by at least 33 per cent below current levels by 2020. This will place British Columbia's greenhouse gas emissions at 10 per cent under 1990 levels by 2020.

It is an aggressive target and will set a new standard. To achieve that goal we will need to be focused and relentless in its pursuit.

Interim targets will be set for 2012 and 2016.

Leaders from business, community groups, and citizens themselves are calling for a new environmental playing field that is fair and balanced but that recognizes we all need to change. We all need to be part of the solution.

The soon-to-be released new climate action and energy plans will be complemented by an air quality improvement initiative.

Each of those plans will aspire to meet or beat the best practices in North America for reducing carbon and other greenhouse gases.

Because our emissions have grown so much since 1990, our task of reducing emissions in percentage terms will be that much more difficult.

Clearly there is a limit to what can be credibly accomplished within any given period of time.

A Climate Action Team will be established. Working with First Nations, other governments, industries, environmental organizations, and the scientific community it will determine the most credible, aggressive, and economically viable sector targets possible for 2012 and 2016.

The Climate Action Team will also be asked to identify practicable options and actions for making the government of British Columbia carbon neutral by 2010.

Your government is confident that balanced action will provide solutions that reduce costs, increase productivity, and make a leading contribution to environmental improvement.

This will be hard work but there is no place better suited to meet this challenge than B.C. because of our diverse and strong economy.

A longer-term emissions reduction target for 2050 will also be established for British Columbia, as it has been for Canada, California, and Oregon.

Citizens might be rightly skeptical of any such long-term targets. What we do today will rightly be judged for the example it sets.

Our economy has the strength and resources to be bold and far reaching.

Indeed, being bold and far sighted will foster innovation, new technologies, and plant the seeds of success. Just as the government's energy vision of 40 years ago led to massive benefits today, so will our decisions today provide far reaching benefits in 2040 and 2050.

Our actions will mean more jobs, new investments, and ultimately greater prosperity for British Columbia. Climate action must be seen and pursued as an economic opportunity as well as an environmental imperative.

Your government's comprehensive climate change and energy strategies will rest on a number of defining principles.

The new energy plan will require British Columbia to be electricity self-sufficient by 2016.

A new personal conservation ethic will form the core of citizen actions in the years ahead. Conservation provides huge benefits at minimal cost.

All new and existing electricity produced in B.C. will be required to have net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2016.

That target may be unprecedented in North America, but it is achievable and realistic in B.C.

Under the new energy plan, British Columbia will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas industry to 2000 levels by 2016.

That will include a requirement for zero flaring at producing wells and production facilities.

The energy plan will require that at least 90 per cent of our electricity comes from clean, renewable sources.

Effective immediately, British Columbia will become the first jurisdiction in North America, if not the world, to require 100 per cent carbon sequestration for any coal-fired project.

That means no greenhouse gas emissions will be permitted for coal-fired electricity projects anywhere in British Columbia.

Your government will look to all forms of clean, alternative energy in meeting British Columbians' needs in our provincial economy.

Bioenergy, geothermal energy, tidal, run-of-the-river, solar, and wind power are all potential energy sources in a clean, renewable, low-carbon future.

Your government will pursue British Columbia's potential as a net exporter of clean, renewable energy.

A new $25-million Innovative Clean Energy Fund will be established to encourage the commercialization of alternative energy solutions and new solutions for clean remote energy that can solve many challenges we face right here in B.C.

Trees infested by the mountain pine beetle will be used to create new clean energy. Wood chips and other wood waste will be better utilized to produce clean power.

Beehive burners will be eliminated in British Columbia.

Legislation will be developed over the next year to phase in new requirements for methane capture in our landfills, the source of about nine per cent of B.C.'s greenhouse gas emissions.

That methane can and should be used for clean energy.

New technologies will be encouraged to "green the grid" and reduce energy losses in transmission.

In the weeks ahead, the Premier will meet the governors of Washington and California to work in partnership on several of these and other initiatives to reduce net greenhouse gases in the Pacific Coast Region.

British Columbia will work with California to assess and address the impacts of climate change on our ocean resources and establish common environmental standards for all our Pacific ports. Your government will seek federal co-operation to electrify our ports

and reduce container ships' carbon emissions in all of Canada's ports.

A co-ordinated, integrated, market-based approach will be critical to meeting our targets.

Your government will work with the federal government and its Pacific partners to develop a sensible, efficient system for registering, trading, and purchasing carbon offsets and carbon credits.

Later this spring, your government will invite all Pacific Coast governors and their key cabinet members to British Columbia to forge a new Pacific Coast Collaborative that extends from Alaska to California.

Transportation represents about 40 per cent of B.C.'s total greenhouse gas emissions.

B.C. will work with its neighbours to create electrified truck stops and support other anti-idling measures for heavy vehicles.

A federal-provincial partnership will be investing $89 million for fuelling stations and the world's first fleet of 20 fuel cell buses. This expansion of the number of hydrogen fuelling stations is part of the initial phase of the hydrogen highway. That highway will run from Whistler to Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria.

But that is just a start.

Your government will work with California and other Pacific states to push for a hydrogen highway that runs from Whistler to San Diego by 2010.

The Gateway Project will reduce congestion, improve traffic flow, and reduce emissions from vehicle idling.

It will dramatically expand cycling networks and connect communities as never before with safer cycling paths and healthier alternatives to driving.

It will establish, for the first time in 20 years, a new transit corridor and open the way for transit improvements to the Fraser Valley connecting Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Langley, and Surrey to Coquitlam and Vancouver.

Electronic tolls will help restrain traffic growth and transit funding will work in concert with decisions to increase densities, reduce sprawl, and reduce costs.

The new $40-million LocalMotion Fund will also help local governments build walkways, cycling paths, disability access, and other improvements aimed at getting people out of their cars and back on their feet.

The new Canada Line will reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by up to 14,000 tonnes by 2021.

New measures will be implemented to encourage and dramatically increase local transit alternatives.

Over the next year, new regional transit options will be established for our major urban areas in the Lower Mainland, the Fraser Valley, the Capital Regional District and the Okanagan.

New tailpipe emission standards for all new vehicles sold in B.C. will be phased in over the period 2009 to 2016.

Those standards will reduce carbon dioxide emissions by some 30 per cent for automobiles.

British Columbia will establish a low-carbon fuel standard.

It will reduce the carbon intensity of all passenger vehicles by at least 10 per cent by 2020.

These new standards will be developed in recognition of what is already mandated in California, to ensure they are viable and achievable.

Your government has already introduced fuel tax exemptions for ethanol and biodiesel portions of fuels blended with gasoline and diesel.

The $2,000 sales tax exemption on new hybrid vehicles will be extended to help make those cleaner cars more affordable.

Moving to a hybrid car from a four-wheel-drive SUV can cut personal transportation emissions by up to 70 per cent overnight.

Beginning this month, all new cars leased or purchased by the provincial government will be hybrid vehicles.

New measures will also be taken to reduce energy consumption and emissions in the public sector.

New strategies will be launched to promote Pacific Green universities, colleges, hospitals, schools, prisons, ferries, and airports.

An important symbol of leadership in that regard starts right here in the legislative precinct.

As the Legislative Buildings are upgraded to meet modern seismic standards, new standards of energy efficiency will be set and met.

Many other initiatives will form part of your government's climate action strategy.

A new unified B.C. Green Building Code will be developed over the next year with industry, professional, and community representatives.

Incentives will be implemented to retrofit existing homes and buildings to make them more energy efficient.

New measures will be taken to help homeowners undertake "energy audits" that show them where and how savings can be achieved.

New real-time, in-home smart metering will be launched to help homeowners measure and reduce their energy consumption.

These measures will demand new personal commitment, new investments, and new funding.

Your government remains committed to putting more money back in people's pockets, which allows them more choice in personal spending.

It remains committed to competitive tax rates that stimulate investment and job creation.

This government does not support new taxes on productivity that create disincentives to capital investment. But it does believe that our tax system should encourage responsible actions and individual choices.

The cost of climate change is directly related to our consumption.

Over the next year, the Province will consider the range of possibilities aimed at encouraging personal choices that are environmentally responsible.

It will look for new ways to encourage overall tax savings through shifts in behaviour that reduce carbon consumption.

For our goals to be met citizens must take primary responsibility and make choices that reflect their values.

Conservation is key to a greener future.

Public education and information is critical in that regard.

Your government will ensure that our children have the benefit of that knowledge in their school curricula.

It will work to build literacy on early actions that can be taken at home and at work to make a positive difference to reduce our individual impact on the environment.

A new Citizens' Conservation Council will be established and funded.

Your government will also invest in our forests, nature's carbon sinks.

Next year will mark the six-billionth tree planted in British Columbia since reforestation efforts began in 1930. It took 51 years of planting before our first billion trees were planted.

Today we are planting about 200 million trees a year, or one billion trees every five years.

In the new world, those new trees will have new value as carbon sinks and oxygen creators which help clean our air and offset greenhouse gases. On average, each new tree planted offsets up to one tonne of carbon dioxide over its lifetime.

Your government will substantially increase its tree-planting efforts, which will increase the amount of carbon that is offset each year through reforestation and afforestation.

The new Green Cities Project will foster innovations that reduce our imprint on the planet through sustainable community planning.

New measures will be developed to promote "urban forestry" and new community gardens.

These are just part of the Green Cities Project.

The Green City Awards will recognize B.C.'s most environmentally friendly communities.

The $21-million Towns For Tomorrow infrastructure program will help small towns across B.C. make improvements in their communities over the next three years.

The new B.C. Spirit Squares program will provide $20 million for communities to create or enhance outdoor public meeting places.

Those new outdoor gathering spaces will be built in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Colony of British Columbia in 2008.

These new civic spaces will be legacies for our children to celebrate our heritage, culture and community achievements.

Vibrant communities are livable, lively places.

More housing choices and more pedestrian activity are key components of healthier communities.

Housing is the Cornerstone of Strong Social Policy

The challenges of housing, homelessness, addictions, and mental health require us to rethink the actions of a generation.

Homelessness is a plague that weakens our cities, siphons our strength, and erodes our social fabric.

It weakens us all. It is unacceptable.

The failed approaches of the past that require more money but deliver no improvement are also not acceptable.

New approaches are needed.

Your government believes municipal governments with populations greater than 25,000 should identify and zone appropriate sites for supportive housing and treatment facilities for persons with mental illnesses and addictions in official community plans by 2008.

Changes will be developed to existing funding and transfer payments to ensure integrated regional transportation and housing planning.

We will encourage local government to exempt small-unit, supportive housing projects from development cost charges and levies.

A new assessment class and new tax exemptions for small-unit, supportive housing will be developed over the next year for this legislature's consideration.

This government wishes to add to housing stock while reducing housing costs and reducing the environmental footprint of sprawling communities.

Urban sprawl puts pressure on our limited land base and increases servicing costs for property taxpayers for new roads, bridges, and rapid transit; for sewage and water services; and for increased energy and transmission.

Larger lots, larger homes, excessive fees, and longer time frames have pushed home prices beyond the economic reach of too many. Economic costs have increased and so have environmental ones.

Working with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the private sector the government will develop new incentives to encourage smaller lot sizes and smaller, more energy efficient homes that use less land, less energy, less water, and are less expensive to own.

Our communities should be places where women, children, and seniors can safely walk the streets.

Changes to make police financing equitable for smaller communities with fewer than 5,000 residents will be introduced this session.

Our communities should be places where children are cared for and are safe.

Further improvements to the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* will be introduced this session.

Your government will introduce legislation to end mandatory retirement as recommended by the Premier's Council on Aging and Seniors' Issues.

Your Government's Focus on Improving and Protecting Public Health Care Will Continue

The Conversation on Health is now well underway. It will guide future improvements.

The new First Nations Health Plan was a major milestone that will improve health determinants, health delivery, and health outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Major new initiatives in health promotion are underway.

The ActNow BC program is making progress in fostering greater physical activity, healthier eating habits, and tobacco reduction.

The Action Schools! BC program is spreading into our classrooms across the province to promote healthy living among our students.

Your government is eliminating junk food in all public schools and in all vending machines in provincially owned buildings.

The School Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program is in 50 schools this year and will be available to every public school by 2010.

New measures are being taken to reduce tobacco use.

New supports are being offered to persons on income assistance to help kick their smoking habit.

Legislation will be introduced this session to ban smoking on all school property.

Smoking will be phased out in all indoor public spaces by 2008.

As well as health promotion, new services will be added.

A new electronic surgical patient registry will give patients more control over their surgical options, improve public reporting of wait times, and enable better surgical treatment planning.

A new electronic medical records system will be launched to give physicians better access to patient records and improve service to patients.

The BC HealthGuide will be available in Punjabi and Chinese, to give families in those communities better access to health information in their mother language.

Despite efficiency gains, new funding, and increased service levels attained in the last five years, challenges in health delivery remain.

The demand for new services, technologies, drugs, and treatments continues to grow faster than our ability to pay for them.

The demand for more nurses, doctors, and other health providers grows faster than our capacity to hire and train them.

Insatiable demands for more funding in health care have gone past the tipping point.

Left unchecked, those demands will see our public health care system reach the breaking point, not in decades, but in a matter of years.

Health funding will be increased once again in the new fiscal year by an additional $885 million.

Overall health spending will have grown by 51.8 per cent since the year 2000 — or about four times the rate of inflation in that period.

Next year's increase in health funding will be 7.3 per cent — twice the rate of economic growth and over three times the current rate of inflation.

Yet the pressures on our health care system continue to escalate.

We must face up to that reality and do what is necessary to make our health care system sustainable for the future.

Your government will continue to listen and learn from British Columbians, to innovate, and to explore new ways of delivering better health services.

And it will lead fundamental health reforms that increase individual choice and maximize the supply of health services within the budgets available.

This will not be easy.

It will not come without controversy or change.

This government is determined to put our public health care system on a footing that ensures sustainability.

The most effective health promotion strategy we have discovered to date is education and individual action.

This Government is Determined to Make B.C. the Best Educated, Most Literate Jurisdiction on the Continent

Changes passed last year in this Assembly to reduce class sizes, increase accountability, and give parents a new role in class planning are paying off.

For the first time, all school districts are required to publicly report their class sizes, class by class and school by school.

For the first time, they are being held legally accountable for legislated class size and composition requirements.

Here are the results.

There are now over 1,000 more classes in our schools than there were last year, with over 12,000 fewer enrolled students.

In every single district across B.C. average class sizes have dropped this past year.

In every applicable grade, the number of classes with more than 30 students declined.

On average, the number of classes with over 30 students in Grades 4 to 12 declined by 65 per cent.

Parents, teachers and school boards should all be proud of that achievement.

The student-teacher ratio is now as low as it has ever been in British Columbia.

The number of classes across B.C. with two or more ESL students has gone down in the last year.

These are positive trends.

Student completion rates have gone up over the past five years.

However, one in five students does not complete, and over half of B.C.'s Aboriginal students do not complete their studies.

We need to improve to meet the needs of students who are failing to complete.

This year, new steps will be taken to lift our students to higher levels of achievement.

These reforms will be focused on improving quality, choice, and accountability.

British Columbians know that as good as our education system is, it can and must be even better.

Teachers certainly know that.

Your government will act to give teachers new recognition and financial incentives to reward improvements in student achievement and promote professional development.

Teachers will be offered voluntary leadership certification, new resources, professional development, and online supports.

A Premier's Award For Teaching Excellence will also be established to annually recognize and reward excellence in teaching.

New legislation will be introduced to broaden the mandate of school boards, as reflected in a new title: Boards of Education.

Amendments to the *School Act* will also be introduced to enable boards to offer "special academies" upon the approval of school planning councils and consultation with parents.

Boards will be authorized to charge fees approved by school planning councils to defray non-instructional costs or additional costs incurred in offering special academies, trades programs, and band instruments.

This measure will give boards the tools they need to offer students access to programs that might otherwise be closed as a result of the recent Supreme Court ruling.

Boards of Education will also be given a new opportunity to provide early learning programs to preschoolers.

Up to 80 StrongStart Centres will open in underutilized school spaces over the next year. They will help our youngest students to enter school ready to learn.

Boards of Education will be required to develop district literacy plans to improve literacy. They will help co-ordinate literacy initiatives in their communities.

The new ReadNow BC program will provide $27 million in initial funding to help British Columbians improve their reading skills.

The role of district superintendents will be expanded to be responsible to boards for improving student achievement.

New provincial Superintendents of Achievement will be appointed by the Province to report and make recommendations on improving student achievement in school districts.

New "sunshine legislation" will shed new light on school district companies' business practices. New public reporting and auditing requirements, and new obligations for their directors to be at arm's length from parent boards, will be established.

More choice and flexibility will be encouraged to better meet student needs.

The Graduation Portfolio Standard will be simplified to focus on physical activity, career planning, and community service.

While the Province will set standards for meeting graduation requirements, Boards of Education will determine the most appropriate learning and instruction methods for meeting provincial standards in their districts, including whether or not to offer a portfolio program.

Amendments will be introduced to broaden the Education Minister's capacity to create provincial schools and offer more choice in learning.

Provincial schools will offer new choices in curricula, new course content, and new demonstration schools better tailored to unique student needs.

These new provincial schools will build on the virtual school that is now serving over 16,000 students provincewide.

The virtual school is providing new round-the-clock access to learning, tutoring, and academic supports.

These new measures will be supported in a new B.C. Education Guarantee that assures that all students have ongoing access to courses required for high school completion and that all British Columbians who need it have free, easy access to adult basic education through LearnNowBC.

This year the government will:

Ensure new residents can obtain support in ESL training and streamlined professional and skilled labour certification, to help them use the skills they bring to B.C.;

Establish a teacher employment registry, administered by the College of Teachers, to publicly report the names of teachers disciplined for misconduct involving emotional, physical, or sexual abuse;

Require annual public reports for all public schools on the statistics relating to teacher hirings, terminations, disciplinary actions, and professional development;

And give government the ability to directly communicate with all teachers in B.C.

Amendments will be introduced to require all Boards of Education to establish codes of conduct for students that meet provincially set standards and that institute "zero tolerance" of bullying in B.C.'s schools.

Your government pledged to use underutilized school spaces as public spaces to deliver on public priorities.

It will work with boards to better manage capital planning across all school districts.

A new process will be put in place to ensure that schools or school lands are used for their highest and best use for maximum public benefit.

The Government Will Open Canada's Pacific Gateway to New Worlds of Knowledge and Economic Opportunity

Knowledge is the key to unlocking our citizens' true potential in the digital world.

Skilled workers are the sine qua non of a modern, competitive economy.

That is why your government has embarked on the largest post-secondary and apprenticeship expansion in 40 years.

It is why it is acting to create 2,500 new graduate spaces and 7,000 more apprenticeship spaces by 2010.

It is why it is expanding the number of industry training organizations in partnership with the Industry Training Authority and the private sector.

Across this province, access to advanced education is better than ever.

Over $1 billion has been invested in capital improvements in post-secondary education since 2001.

Another $800 million has been allocated to further expand our universities, colleges, and institutes.

The 25,000 new post-secondary spaces are well underway.

That new legacy of leadership will give B.C.'s young adults and lifelong learners new opportunities for higher learning where they live.

This year a new Children's Education Credit will be established and a new Pacific Leaders Fellowship will be created to provide university students new financial incentives to pursue careers in the provincial public service.

It will also provide existing public servants new opportunities to upgrade their skills.

Campus 2020 will help shape the vision of B.C.'s post-secondary system for years to come.

As your government works to train new workers and give them the skills they need to prosper in this Pacific Century, it will also do more to attract and recruit skilled workers.

The Provincial Nominee Program will be substantially expanded and new efforts will be made to expedite entry for temporary workers in skills-shortage areas.

All of these measures are aimed at maximizing our provincial potential in this time of profound change and global growth.

Central to your government's Great Goal on job creation is maximizing our Pacific advantage.

The government will invest in B.C.'s ports, airports, railways, roads, and bridges to capitalize on British Columbia's core competitive advantage — our location as Canada's only Pacific province.

The heart of your government's economic vision is British Columbia's unique competitive advantage — our proximity, cultural ties, and natural connections to the Asia-Pacific.

Our Pacific advantage will have positive impacts in transportation, in research and technology, in trade development, investment, immigration, and tourism.

The government will unleash our Pacific promise as a budding powerhouse of clean, renewable energy; profitable, sustainable forestry; world-leading technology; high-quality manufacturing; value-added agricultural products; award-winning wines; world-class mineral deposits; and superb tourism destinations.

Investment in mineral exploration in B.C. soared to a record-high $265 million in 2006 — an 800 per cent increase from 2001.

In that one sector alone, our province has incredible potential for new investment, jobs, opportunities, and partnerships with our Asia-Pacific customers.

Several amendments will be introduced this session to enhance mineral exploration and to also afford private property owners new rights of notice before any person can enter their land for mineral exploration.

New legislation will be tabled to facilitate resort development and establish new resort municipalities that open up our Pacific potential in tourism.

Other measures will be aimed at helping small business.

B.C.'s new tourism strategy will target new markets for growth in the Asia-Pacific and new potential for growth in eco-tourism, agri-tourism, Aboriginal tourism, and cultural tourism.

Your government will continue to pursue a true partnership with the Government of Canada to open Canada's Pacific Gateway.

British Columbians' tax dollars paid to build the St. Lawrence Seaway 50 years ago. Those investments consolidated Canada's place as the Atlantic's primary entrance to the heart of North America. All Canadians benefited.

It is time for Canada to make the same commitment and seize the same opportunity for its Pacific Gateway.

The Asia-Pacific Trade Council is building a blueprint for our province to fully seize upon our Pacific potential in key markets.

Japan, China, India, and South Korea are all vital to our future.

The government will dedicate new resources to capture British Columbia's Asia-Pacific opportunities.

The potential for mutual benefit is enormous.

Three Short Years from Today, British Columbians will be Living Their Olympic Dream

We will be one day past the opening ceremonies.

Canadians across this land will be glued to their televisions and computers as Canadian athletes reach higher, dig deeper, and go faster — striving to be the best in the world.

It has been said that, "In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level.... A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now."

This is our time.

This is British Columbia's time to lead.

Let us strive to inspire others with our commitment and determination.

Let us seize this moment of strength and optimism to embrace the Olympic spirit and capture the Pacific promise.

The torch of hope is in our hands.

Let us hold the torch high and act with speed and purpose, confident in our endeavour.

Let us test our limits and give our grandchildren the gift of a better province, a better country, and a better world.